

# Prevention PAYS

In this extraordinarily challenging time, it is critical for policy makers to insist that investments in prevention and early intervention programs be maintained at current levels.

The adage “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure” reflects the importance and cost-effectiveness of prevention and early intervention. This avoids the ‘pay later’ approach to problems and saves the costs of foster care, juvenile and adult corrections, public assistance and other expensive programs.

This paper was prepared by Prevention Pays, a broad-based, statewide work group of organizations who understand not only how tough today’s budget choices are, but how important they are to tomorrow.

## What would cuts to prevention and early intervention programs mean?



**Child abuse and neglect:** New brain imaging surveys show that child abuse and neglect can cause permanent damage to the neural structure and functions of the developing brain itself.<sup>1</sup>

**Poor school performance:** A study of abused and neglected children found that they had lower grades, more suspensions, disciplinary referrals, grade repetitions, and were more likely to drop-out of school than their peers, independent of the effects of poverty.<sup>2</sup>

Middle and high school students with even *moderate* involvement with substance use and violence/delinquency have dramatically lower academic achievement than groups of students with little or no involvement in these behaviors.<sup>3</sup>

**Removal of children from their home:** Effective prevention and early intervention services can prevent removal of children from their home. The average cost to the State of Washington for caring for a child in foster care is more than \$1,000 per month.<sup>4</sup>

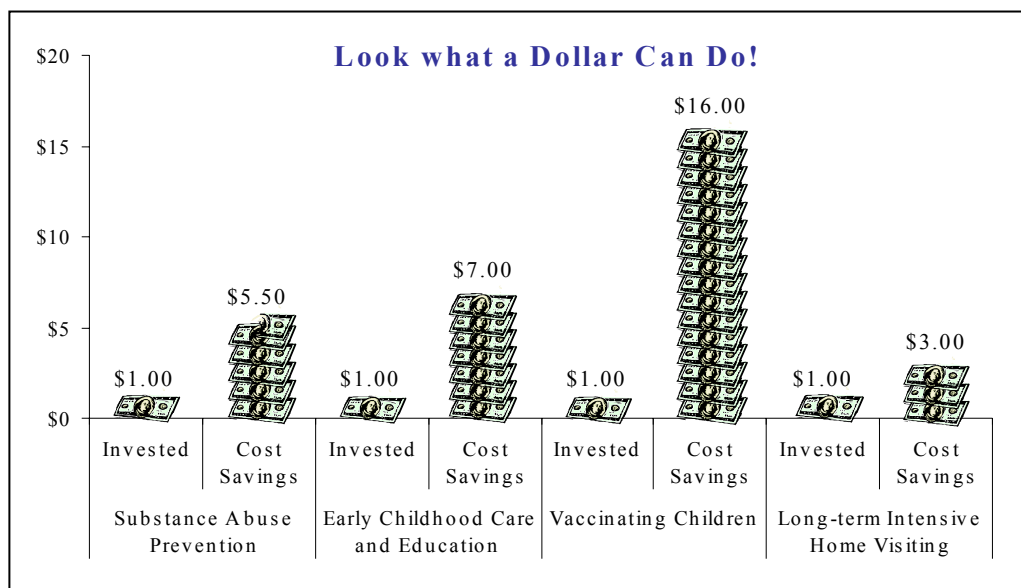


**Youth crime and delinquency:** Youth who experienced maltreatment during childhood were significantly more likely to display a variety of problem behaviors during adolescence, including serious violent delinquency, teen pregnancy, drug use, low academic achievement, and mental health problems.<sup>5</sup> Forty-seven percent of all abused and neglected children grow up to be violent offenders.<sup>6</sup> Children who have suffered abuse or neglect are arrested 4.8 times more often for juvenile crimes and are twice as likely to be arrested as adults.<sup>7</sup>

In a survey of police officers conducted by Fight Crime, Invest in Kids, 9 out of 10 officers agreed "America could sharply reduce crime if government invested more in programs to help children and youth get a good start. **If America does not pay for greater investments in programs to help children and youth now, we will all pay far more later, in crime, welfare, and other costs.**"

## Effective prevention programs save money and save lives

- Every \$1 invested in **substance abuse prevention** saves **\$5.50** in costs for health care, law enforcement, and incarceration.<sup>8</sup>
- Every \$1 invested in quality **early childhood care and education** saves **\$7** by increasing the likelihood that children will be literate, employed, and enrolled in post-secondary education, and less likely to be school dropouts, dependent on welfare, or arrested for criminal activity or delinquency.<sup>9</sup>
- Every \$1 invested **vaccinating children** against measles, mumps, and rubella **saves \$16** in direct medical costs to treat those illnesses.<sup>10</sup>
- Every \$1 invested in **long-term intensive home visiting** saves **\$3** in costs for government assistance and criminal justice costs according to evaluation of the David Old's Elmira Prenatal/Early Infancy Project. It can pay for itself in the first 4-years of a child's life.<sup>11</sup>



## Effective prevention programs are research-based, targeted to engage each family, outcome-focused and sustained over time

Effective programs can clearly answer, “What has changed in the lives of individuals, families, organizations or the community as a result of this program?” Effective programs use outcomes to measure and continually improve their effectiveness.



### Prevention Pays in Washington

**Last year 40,668 children were involved in accepted referrals to Child Protective Services. These children can't vote. They depend on your voice.**



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